DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 399 JC 020 140

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TITLE Preliminary Report on the Impact of Follow Up Counseling on Academic Performance and Persistence.
INSTITUTION Gavilan Coll., Gilroy, CA.
PUB DATE 2001-08-00
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; Community Colleges; Counseling; *Counseling Effectiveness; *Educational Counseling; Grade Point Average; High Risk Students; Outreach Programs; *Potential Dropouts; School Holding Power; Two Year Colleges; *Withdrawal (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Gavilan College CA

ABSTRACT

This study documents visits to a follow-up counselor at Gavilan College (California) beginning in the fall of 2000. Students on dismissal are required to visit a counselor prior to enrolling to assist them in designing an achievable academic plan. The goals of the follow-up counseling include: (1) helping students raise their grade point averages (GPA) above 2.0; (2) increasing the number of units a student is taking; (3) reducing withdrawals; and (4) encouraging re-enrollment in subsequent terms. The counselor saw 68 students in fall 2000 and 85 students in spring 2001, with 25 of these students being seen in both semesters. In fall 2000, 79% of students responded to outreach efforts with at least one visit, while in spring 2001, 66% of students responded. No significant relationship between number of visits and increased GPA was found. Also, the number of units attempted significantly declined from a median of 9.0 units to a median of 6.5 units after counseling. There was a significant decline in the number of drops per non-summer term after students received follow up services. Finally, when comparing the 2000-2001 persistence rates, the study found that students contacted by and visiting the counselor were statistically more likely to persist than other students. (NB)

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GAVILAN COLLEGE

Preliminary Report On The Impact Of Follow Up Counseling On Academic Performance And Persistence

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August 2001

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Preliminary Report On The Impact Of Follow Up Counseling On Academic Performance And Persistence

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Terrence Willett, Director
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Summary

Follow up counseling is most strongly related to an increase in retention and persistence and a decrease in the number of units attempted without a decrease in the number of units completed. Further, outreach efforts appeared to occur at a level sufficient to attract interested students. Future analysis will explore the number of visits to other counselors, planned work hours, educational goals and other potentially influencing factors.

Introduction

Beginning Fall 2000, Gavilan students on academic dismissal are required to visit a dedicated follow up counselor prior to enrolling to assist them in designing an achievable academic plan. It is hoped that this intensive mandatory service has resulted in improved academic performance and movement towards educational goals. The main goals of follow up counseling include:

1) students raising their GPA above 2.0,

2) increasing the number of completed units,

3) reducing withdrawals,

4) encouraging re-enrollment in subsequent terms.

Past research has found that similar interventions with at risk populations have resulted in increased GPA, increased persistence, and increased voluntary use of counseling (Polansky, Horan, & Hanish 1993; Schwitzer et al. 1993; Wilson, Mason, & Ewing 1997). This preliminary report discusses the effectiveness of outreach efforts and tests whether mandatory follow up counseling is related to increases in GPA, increases in the number of units earned, decreased class withdrawals, and increased persistence.

Methods

The follow up counselor saw 68 students in Fall 2000 and 85 students in Spring 2001 with 25 of those students being seen both semesters. There were a total of 105 visits resulting from outreach efforts consisting of at least 153 letters, 115 cards to those not responding to the letter and 53 calls to those not responding to the card. In Fall 2000, 79% of students responded with at least one visit and in Spring 2001, 66% of students responded with at least one visit. The number of visits to the follow up counselor ranged from none to five with one visit being most common.

Evaluations consisted of relating outreach effort to number of visits, correlating change in GPA during the term follow up counseling was received to the number of visits, median number of units completed and withdrawals before and after follow up counseling, and persistence rates before and after follow up counseling. None of these variables showed a normal distribution and data transformations proved unsatisfactory so the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U non-parametric tests were used when comparing central tendencies. Data were extracted from the campus data warehouse using Brio Explorer 6.0 and analyzed using SPSS 10.1.4.

Results

In Table 1 we see that the card sent after the initial letter was associated with a large number of students visiting but that the highest level of effort showed diminishing returns with the average number of visits significantly different between levels of effort ($\chi^2(2) = 79.9$, $p < 0.0005$).

By comparing the number of visits to the follow up counselor with change in GPA during the term, we do not find a significant relation ($F(1,123) = 1.011$, $p = 0.317$; Figure 1). There also was not a significant difference in the average number of units earned in a non-summer term by students before and after receiving follow up services (Table 2; $Z = -0.497$, $p = 0.619$). The number of units attempted significantly declined from a median of 9.0 units attempted before follow up counseling

to a median of 6.5 units attempted after follow up counseling ($Z = -3.110$, $p = 0.002$). There was a significant decline in the number of drops per non-summer term after students received follow up services (Table 3; $Z = -2.679$, $p = 0.007$). Finally, when comparing the 2000-2001 persistence rates between students contacted by and visiting the follow up counselor, students contacted but not visiting, and good standing students, we find that students contacted by and visiting the counselor were significantly more likely to persist than other students (Table 4).

Discussion

Each additional level of outreach effort did seem to bring in additional students but at a quickly diminishing rate for the greatest effort level. This suggests that the students who did not visit may not be persuadable by current outreach efforts due to circumstances beyond the counselors influence and so additional efforts were not likely not have been beneficial. Follow up counseling was related most strongly to increases in persistence behavior and decreases in course drops. This change in behavior is beneficial to the student as both staying in school and reducing drops enables them to move off probation. The lack of increase in units earned may be due to the significant reduction in units attempted, which could be a reflection of students setting more realistic expectations for what they can achieve. The lack of increase in GPA may reflect the difficulty of raising grades in the short term. Perhaps there will be gains in GPA in future semesters. Other research suggests that there may have also been an increase in seeking voluntary counseling (Schwitzer et al. 1993) but data on other counselors visited by follow up students is not currently available.

Limitations and Future Research

Foremost is the self-selected nature of the sample and lack of a control group other than a student's own past performance. Also, we do not yet know how many times these students saw other counselors and what influence that may have had. We also do not yet know if before follow up counseling, GPA's tended to increase or decrease over time in the absence of this service. To answer these questions more definitively, this evaluation will be expanded to use the number of visits to follow up counselors as well as other counselors as predictors of change in GPA, units completed, drops, and persistence. Other factors such as educational goal, number of work hours planned, and type of classes taken will also be explored as possible influencing factors. Finally, profiles of follow up students will be compared with profiles of Gavilan College students in general to help refine outreach and counseling efforts.

References

Polansky, P.; Horan, J. J.; & Hanish, C. 1993. Experimental construct validity of the outcomes of study skills training and career counseling as treatments for the retention of at-risk students.

Schwitzer, A. M. 1993. Effects of brief mandatory counseling on help-seeking and academic success among at-risk college students. Journal of College Student Development. 34: 401-405.

Wilson, S. B.; Mason, T. W.; & Ewing, M. J. M. 1997. Evaluating the impact of receiving university-based counseling services on student retention. Journal of counseling psychology. 44.3: 316-320.

Table 1. Level of follow up counselor outreach effort related to student visits for the 2000-2001 year.

	Visits						
Outreach effort	0	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Letter Only		15	7	7		2	2
Letter and Card	3	37	15	6	1		1
Letter, Card, and Call	45	5	3				0
Unknown		6	1				

note: median number of visits significantly differs using a Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2(2) = 79.9$, $p < 0.0005$).

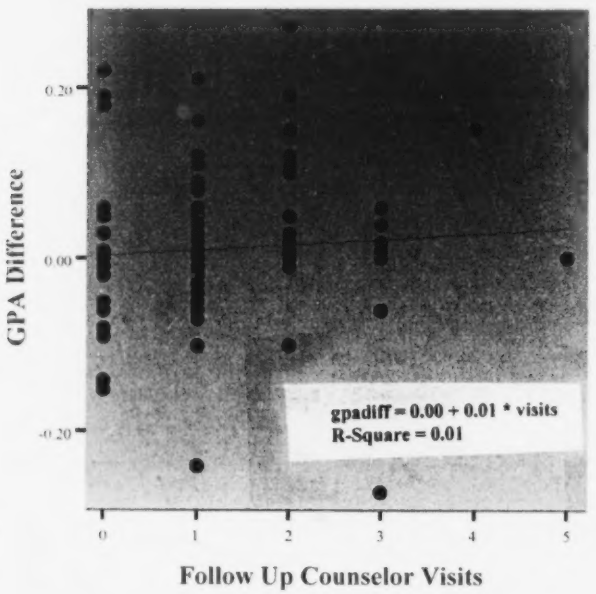

Figure 1. Change in GPA during semester (gpadiff) by number of visits to follow up counselor.

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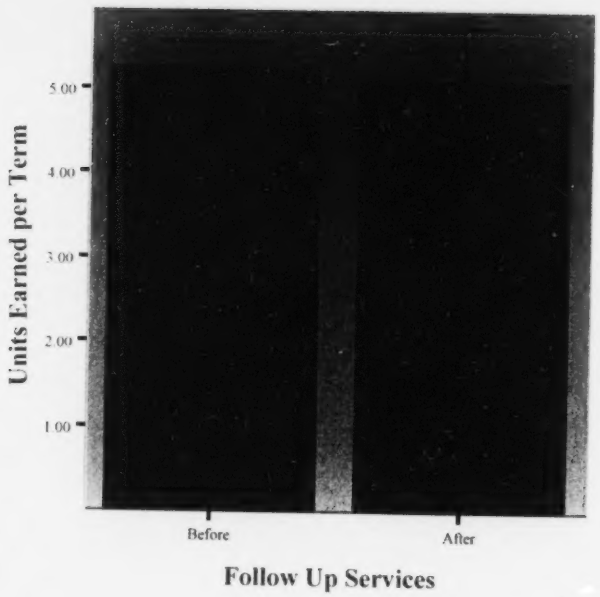
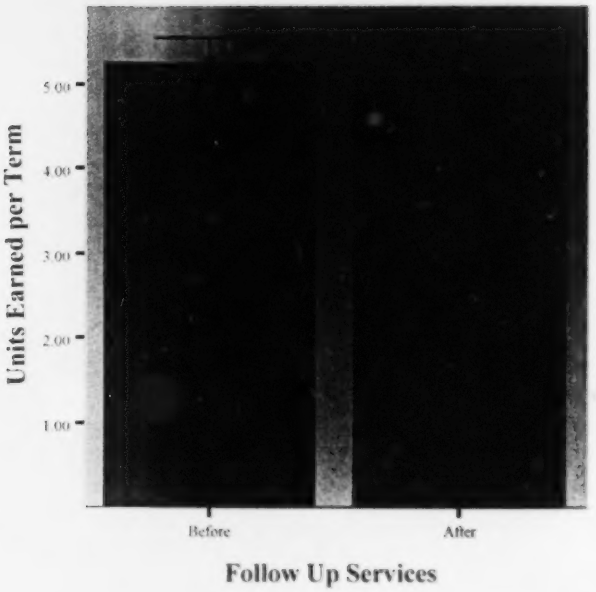


Figure 2. Mean number of units earned per non-summer term before and after follow up counseling with error bars representing 95% confidence intervals.

Table 2. Average number of units earned in a term excluding summers before and after follow up counseling.

	Mean	sd	Median
Before Follow Up Counseling	5.3	3.9	5
After Follow Up Counseling	5.1	3.8	4

note: difference not significant using a Mann-Whitney U test (Z= -0.497, p = 0.619)



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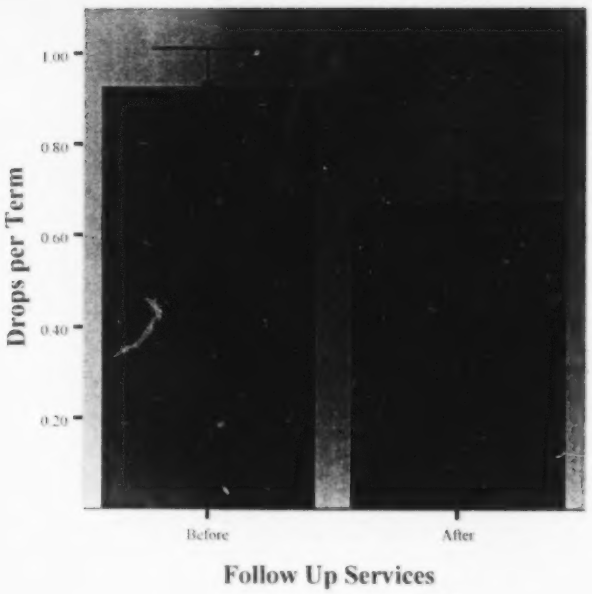

Figure 3. Mean number of drops per non-summer term before and after follow up counseling with error bars representing 95% confidence intervals.

Table 3. Average number of classes dropped in a non-summer term before and after follow up counseling.

	Mean	sd	Median
Before Follow Up Counseling	0.93	1.19	1
After Follow Up Counseling	0.68	1.03	0

note: difference moderately significant using a Mann-Whitney U test (Z= -2.679, p = 0.007)

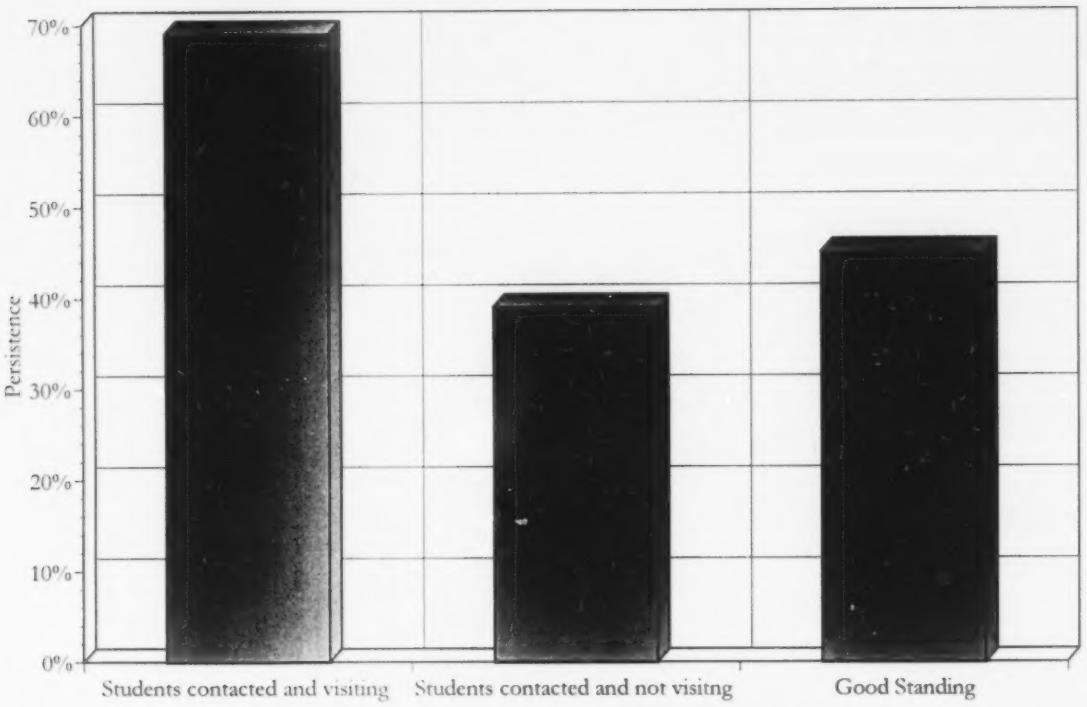

Figure 4. Persistence of students from Fall 2000 to Spring 2001.

Table 4. Persistence of students in relation to standing and interactions with follow up counselor.

	Persistence 2000-2001	
	Percent	N
Students contacted and visiting	68.9%	45
Students contacted and not visiting	38.9%	18
Student in Good Standing	44.9%	5591

note: rates significantly differ ($\chi^2(2) = 10.7$, $p = 0.005$)